



HELPING TST AND JA PARTICIPANTS USE LINKEDIN FOR PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING



With more than 300 million members worldwide, LinkedIn is the most popular social media website for professional networking. It's been reported that

more than 90% of human resource managers are using it to recruit candidates. It is also being used by them to determine if the candidate is a good fit with their organization and to confirm what appears on a candidate's resume. If your Technical Skills Training (TST) or Jobs Accelerator (JA) participants do not have LinkedIn profiles, they may be missing out on employment opportunities or hurting their prospects during the employment vetting process. But simply encouraging participants to create a LinkedIn profile may not be sufficient to achieve the desired results. For a profile to be effective, it must be properly composed and used as a launch pad for professional networking. This Bulletin will give you some useful tips for helping your trainees use this social media Web site for professional networking. It will provide you with guidance on helping them craft an effective profile and techniques participants can use to expand their online network. We've also provided a checklist you can use for helping your participants fine-tune and promote their LinkedIn profile.

HELPING PARTICIPANTS CREATE AN EFFECTIVE LINKEDIN PROFILE

Participants should be reminded that LinkedIn is *not* a place for social networking and that it should be used solely for building their professional network and staying informed of industry news and trends. A profile needs to be clear, accurate, and complete and there

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should be no spelling or grammatical errors. The photo used should be professional and appropriate clothing should be worn. They should not use an image that is blurred or has a distracting background.

It is highly recommended that they create a professional headline and use terms or keywords relevant to their industry to describe their training or professional experience. Both are needed to capture the attention of recruiters and anyone else who views their profile. Since your participants have been engaged in training, it is essential that they include a brief description of the course of instruction in the profile. If they were engaged in an internship during the training, they should include this as well.



Unlike a resume, which can be fine-tuned for a particular employment opportunity, a LinkedIn profile provides a broader picture of a job candidate and can supplement in a more personal way what typically appears on paper. The summary section is extremely important

and your participants should view it as their branding statement. It should captivate the viewer's attention by succinctly describing a participant's strengths and what makes him or her unique as a professional. This might include work experience, accomplishments, and any credentials that would qualify them for the position they are seeking to secure. To increase their visibility in search engines, it is advisable for them to use terms or keywords relevant to their industry. They should also use bullet points to make this section more readable and avoid clichés. It's far more effective for them to list their accomplishments than describe themselves as accomplished team players.

The experience section resembles what is found in the experience section of resumes. To the greatest extent possible, a participant should include the keywords used in their profession along with measurable achievements. LinkedIn offers several other sections for them to categorize their experience and skills, and the following are of particular value:

- ❖ **Courses** – This section provides an opportunity for a participant to have his or her education stand out. Courses of particular interest to employers can be listed along with the school where the instruction was obtained.
- ❖ **Certifications** – This section can include any certifications, licensures, or clearances a participant has secured.
- ❖ **Projects** – If the participant was engaged in a project during an internship or as a part of a course of instruction, they should use this section. It provides space for a description of the project and a URL if one is available.

❖ **Volunteer Experience** – This section is especially valuable for those who have been out of the workforce for a period of time because it demonstrates that they have remained active and engaged productively during their absence from the workforce.

Although it's not widely known, it's possible to rearrange the boxes so that a person's strengths can be highlighted. If, for example, a participant does not have an extensive work history, his or her recent educational accomplishments can be given more prominence by moving this information to the top of their profile.

CONNECTING PROFESSIONALLY THROUGH LINKEDIN



After your H-1B TST or JA participants have launched their profile, it's time for them to network. The bottom line is that you want them to use the Internet to get off of the Internet and have face-to-face meetings with contacts who can assist them in their search for employment. This requires them to be proactive in making connections and to follow up with an e-mail or telephone call as appropriate. Some participants may feel that they have limited professional connections, especially if they are entering a new career. However, virtually everyone is only two or three connections away from someone in their field of interest.

As they begin the process of making connections, they should reach out to people they know best, starting with family members, friends, fellow students, internship or job supervisors, co-workers, and teachers. You should encourage them to personalize their invitation to connect rather than use the boilerplate provided by LinkedIn. That can be done by finding some degree of connection. For example, "Because we were classmates in

the SQL server database management training program, I'd like to add you to my professional network." They should also be encouraged to identify at least 50 connections that will offer them sufficient critical mass for an effective online network.

Once they have established their network, your participants can communicate with others on LinkedIn using the status update feature. They can use this space to announce an academic achievement or new job, share a link to an interesting article, or pose a question related to their field. It's also possible for them to comment on the status updates made by others in their network. This sharing of news and items of interest strengthens their network by building rapport with others and establishing their online presence. As they establish their online network, they should obtain at least one recommendation from a colleague or an employer who can write with credibility about their experience and abilities.

Your H-1B TST and JA program participants and graduates should be encouraged to join LinkedIn groups that have ties to their industry and career interests and alumni groups associated with the college or educational institution they attended. Once they join a group, they can view and comment on active discussions which provide them with opportunities to learn and be recognized by their peers.

SPECIAL TIPS FOR HELPING YOUR H-1B TST OR JA PARTICIPANTS ENGAGE IN LINKEDIN

- ☛ If you have the capacity, consider setting up a "photo booth" in your program and providing participants with a digital headshot for their use on professional networking websites.
- ☛ To facilitate connections between students, you may want to consider setting up a closed LinkedIn group for TST and JA participants and alumni. The group can be set up at no cost and gives you another avenue for sharing information with participants such as job openings, advancement opportunities, and links to stories of interest. It also provides participants with an opportunity to share information about their search for employment and ask questions. While a closed group requires a commitment of time to manage, it functions as a virtual job club and helps support program retention, job placement, and job retention goals.



CHECKLIST FOR HELPING YOUR TST OR JA PARTICIPANTS FINE-TUNE AND PROMOTE THEIR LINKEDIN PROFILE

- Is the information provided in their profile grammatically correct and organized in a way that highlights their strengths?
- Have they used a professional photograph of themselves?
- Have they used a summary statement that succinctly demonstrates their strengths and uses keywords in their industry?
- Have they provided their industry and location?
- Have they provided their current position as a student with a description?
- Have they listed two past positions?
- Have they provided their educational achievements?
- Have they provided at least three skills?
- Have they made at least 50 connections?
- Have they been providing status updates and sharing good news about themselves?
- Have they joined groups that are relevant to their industry?
- Have they joined their college's alumni group?
- Have they participated in any group discussions?
- Have they done a search for jobs on LinkedIn by clicking on the "jobs" tab at the top of their home page?